DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 406 753 EA 028 322

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TITLE Gold Cove Elementary Schools Reorganization Project, Phase 1: Preliminary Findings.
PUB DATE Mar 97
NOTE 32p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Chicago, IL, March 24-28, 1997).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Change; Educational Environment; Elementary Education; Foreign Countries; Governance; Longitudinal Studies; *Organizational Change; *Organizational Climate; Professional Autonomy; Professional Isolation; *Retrenchment; *School Organization
IDENTIFIERS *Nova Scotia

ABSTRACT

During the mid- to late-1990s, the declining economy in Nova Scotia led to a reduction in the number of school boards and the closure or amalgamation of smaller schools. This paper presents findings from the first phase of a longitudinal case study that explored the amalgamation of five elementary schools in Gold Cove, Nova Scotia. The study uses the frame theory developed by Bolman and Deal (1991) to explore the relationship between the external and internal factors (for the stimulus of change) and the school organism. Data were obtained through a survey of four groups of stakeholders in each school: the administrators, teachers, and support staff; the grade 5 students; the parents of grade 1 and grade 5 students; and a purposive sample of community leaders who did not have children enrolled in the schools. The overall response rate was 71 percent (n=323) out of a total of 453 distributed questionnaires. Interviews were also conducted with teachers and the administrative team. The five closed schools were small, older buildings that served specific ethnocultural, socioeconomic, and religious communities within the town. The five older schools were negatively characterized as aged, rundown, and lacking in both facilities and resources. Respondents expressed substantial expectations that those issues would be corrected at the new Gold Cove Elementary School. However, respondents indicated that they wished to preserve the friendly and community-oriented ambiance of the 5 small schools. The study also identified 12 items--a cluster of negative characteristics common to all five schools--which were analyzed using frame theory. Respondents also recommended making better use of teacher involvement in decision making, school-parent relationships, and community resources. (LMI)

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ED 406 753

Gold Cove Elementary Schools Reorganization Project, Phase I: Preliminary findings[1]

A Paper Presented to the Annual Meeting of the

American Educational Research Association

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[1] This study was supported in part by a grant (#CC-207) from the University Council for Research, St. Francis Xavier University.

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Gold Cove[2] Elementary Schools Reorganization Project, Phase I: Preliminary findings[3]

In this paper are reported, in a preliminary fashion, the findings from Phase 1 of a longitudinal case study which is exploring the amalgamation of five elementary schools in Gold Cove, Nova Scotia, Canada. The five schools were small, older buildings which served specific ethnocultural, socio-economic, and religious communities within the town. With the closure of these schools, all students and many of the staff were relocated to the new Gold Cove Elementary School, a facility which was designed to provide a "high-tech" environment for the children. In this paper I describe the context within which the study is located, report the base line data collected prior to the closing of the original five schools and, through the application of frame theory (Bolman & Deal, 1991), discuss the characteristics of change with respect to the amalgamation of the five schools.

Context

Nova Scotia, the second smallest Canadian province, is located on the north-eastern Atlantic coast. The province has an area of 55,490 square kilometers, or 0.6% of the Canadian land mass, with only Prince Edward Island (at 0.1%) being a smaller province (Statistics Canada, 1997a). A population of 937,800 was recorded in the 1995 census, a figure that represents some 3% of the Canadian population (Statistics Canada, 1997b). The student population of 164,433 (Department of Education and Culture, 1995) is served by 480 schools.

Nova Scotia is a rural province, with resource industries such as fishing, mining, agriculture, and logging forming the foundation of economic development. The fisheries'

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[2] A pseudonym.
[3] A paper in progress. Please do not cite without permission.

industry, which relies heavily on cod, lobster, tuna, herring, and crab, has been adversely effected by declines in those populations. Mining, predominantly of coal, has suffered due to both reduced customer usage and the availability of less expensive imported supplies. Of the others, farming is of secondary importance with approximately 7.5% of land recognized as arable farming land in production, whereas some 74% of the land in Nova Scotia is designated as being utilized by the forestry industry (Statistics Canada, 1997a).

The mid-to-late 1990s are a time of change in Nova Scotia. The downturn in the resource economy generally has had a negative impact on the economic fortunes of the area. Since the mid-1970s, rural depopulation, together with the continuing out-migration of people from the province, has exacerbated the situation. Education responses have included significant amendments to the Education Act (Nova Scotia, 1996), a reduction in the number of school boards from 22 to seven, and many smaller schools either being closed or amalgamated.

The majority of the population in Nova Scotia, and hence the majority of schools, are located in two urban areas. These are the Halifax-Dartmouth-Bedford region, served by the Metropolitan Regional School Board, and the industrial region served by the Millmine[4] Regional School Board (MRSB). The town of Gold Cove lies within the boundaries of the MRSB.

Purpose

The Gold Cove reorganization provided an opportunity to conduct a comprehensive study of educational change within a bounded environment. The study is planned to

[4] Also a pseudonym

continue, in four phases, over a six year period. The initial research was completed from September 1995 to March 1996. Phase 2 of the study extended from September 1996 through to the present and will continue to May 1997; Phases 3 and 4 will be conducted in 1998-1999 and 2000-2001 respectively.

In extending the study over such a period it will be possible to explore a continuum of change, from the year preceding amalgamation through the first five years of existence for the new school. As such the study provides an opportunity to determine how teachers and administrators adapt to periods of change, how students and parents view changes which affect them specifically, and how the concerns and perceptions of community leaders change over time. As one author noted, "when one acquires new possessions in a district that differs from one's own in language, customs, and laws, that is where troubles arise, and where one needs good luck plenty of resolution to hold onto them" (Machiavelli, 1513/1977, p. 7). The opportunity to observe the role played by luck and resolution, as well as by more planned and complex strategies, was one which could not be resisted.

Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991) observed that

> in order to conclude that planned educational change is possible, it would not be sufficient to locate situations where change seems to be working. We would need to find examples where a setting has been *deliberately transformed* from a previous state to a new one that represents clear improvement. (p. 100) [emphasis in original]

The reorganization of the elementary schools in Gold Cove provided such a setting. Those data collected through this study have the potential to identify strategies which lead to successful change. The data and findings from Phase 1 are reported in this paper.

Conceptual Framework

The process by which change occurs within an educational organization has attracted the attention, if not the agreement, of many scholars. The positivistic approach, predicated on change being an observable and measurable "sequence of organizational events" (Johns, 1992, p. 623), might be contrasted with the claim of social construction theorists that educational change must be emancipatory and should be viewed from a personal, not systematic, perspective (e.g., Amatea, Behar-Horenstein, & Sherrard, 1996; McLaren, 1989).

In a seminal article, Firestone and Corbett (1988) provided a comprehensive overview of the research related to planned organizational change. They concluded that "a greater emphasis on understanding school, its formation, and how to shape it currently holds the most promise for building on the momentum of current educational reforms" (p. 338). This study, an ongoing attempt to improve our understanding of the implementation success of change initiatives, is predicated on such an emphasis.

Bolman and Deal (1991) suggested that there are four dimensions to change, these being structural, political, symbolic, and human in nature (pp. 375-377). In this study the change process was analyzed by integrating these dimensions into the S-O-B-C model developed by Luthans (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 1996, p. 218). The Luthans model posits that a stimulus, which "includes internal and external factors" (p. 217), impacts upon the organism, in this instance the school. Behavior within the school is effected by the stimulus upon it and, in turn, has an effect upon the consequences of that behavior. Subsequent reinforcement, whether negative or positive, has the effect of strengthening the behavior of the organism; conversely, punishment or extinction have the effect of

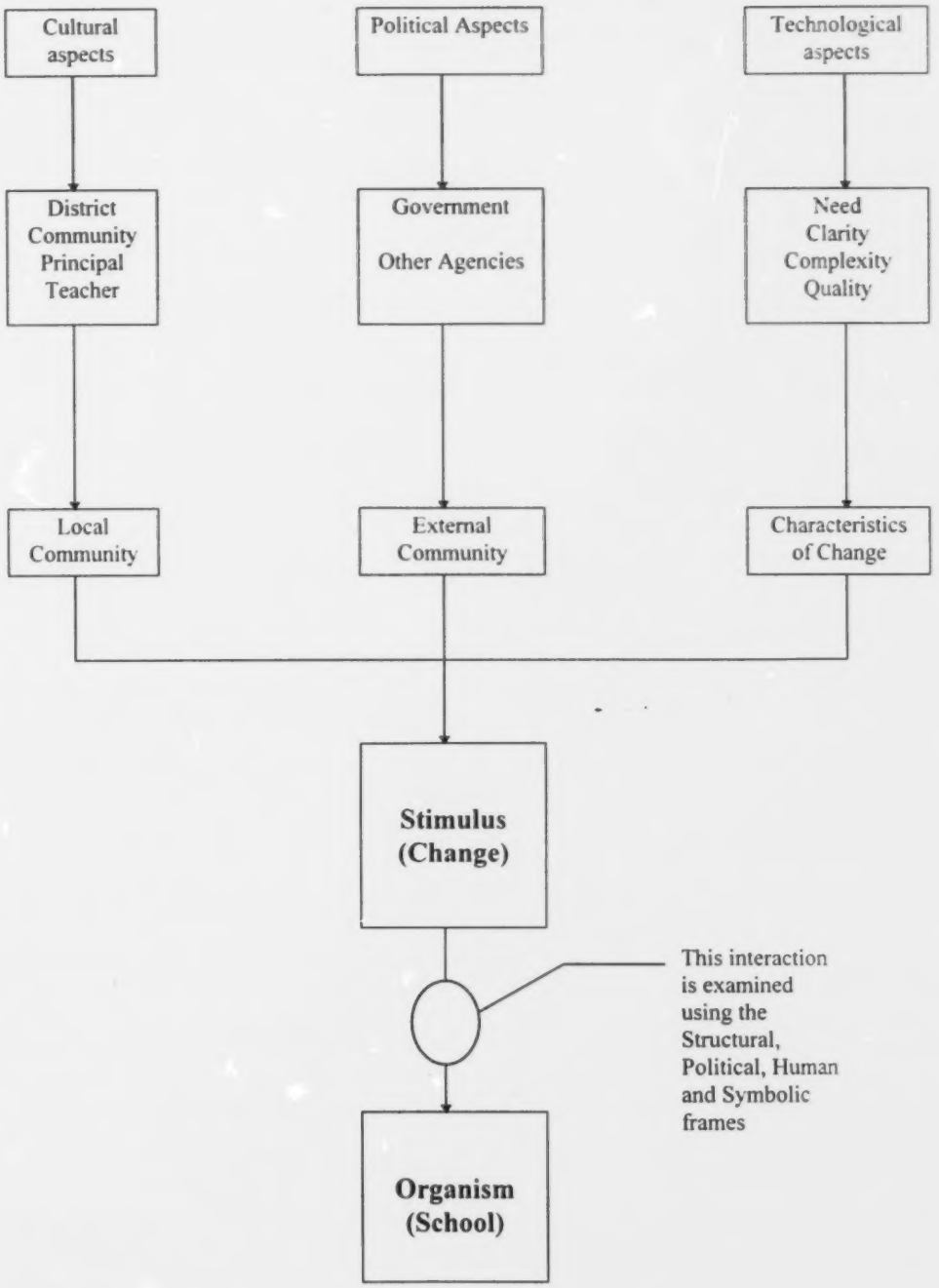
weakening the behavior. I utilized the frame theory developed by Bolman and Deal (1991) as a way to better explore the relationship between the external and internal factors, which constitute the stimulus in the model, and the organism of the school, in the hope that such an examination would provide a further understanding of the change process.

The external and internal factors constituting the stimulus were identified from the model presented by Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991, p. 68). According to this model the implementation of change is affected by a series of nine interactive factors. These exist in three clusters pertaining to the characteristics of the change process itself, those external factors emanating from outside agencies, and the characteristics of the local community.

The characteristics of the change process are defined as being the need for change, the clarity and complexity of the change being contemplated, and the quality of the perceived outcome of the change event (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991). These characteristics are reminiscent of the technological aspects of change determined a decade earlier (House 1981). House also identified the cultural and political aspects of change. The cultural aspects are similar to the characteristics of the local community as defined by Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991). These are district, community, principal, and teacher. The political aspects (House, 1981) are similarly related to what Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991) describe as the government and other agencies.

In the Gold Cove study the school amalgamation was imposed by an external agency. Therefore, it was possible to explore the relationship between the advent of the stimulus and the response of the organism through an analysis of the four dimensions, or frames (Bolman & Deal, 1991), of change previously described.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



Method

A multiplicity of data gathering strategies were utilized in the study. Initial base data were collected by means of a survey questionnaire. These quantitative data were supplemented and enhanced by narrative data collected though interviews and triangulated with archival data from a review of relevant documents.

In the period between September 1995 and January 1996, I made a series of visits to the five schools. These visits served to familiarize me with the various staffs and students, provide a certain amount of anecdotal and narrative data, and develop a more informed sense of the communities served by the schools. A survey instrument was developed during this period and was administered during February and March, 1996.

Survey Instrument

The questionnaires were administered to four groups of stakeholders in each school: the administrators, teachers and support staff; the Grade 5 students; the parents of the Grade 1 and Grade 5 students; and, a purposive sample of community leaders who did not have children enrolled in the schools. The questions in each survey sought the same information but there were slight variations in wording so as to reflect the different experiences and knowledge bases of each group.

The grade 5 students and their parents were selected because this would be the senior grade involved in the transition. As such, a survey of both pre-and post-amalgamation opinion would be possible, using the same population.

The parents of the grade 1 students were selected because these would be the junior grade involved in the transition. As the research project was conceived to be a

longitudinal study, this group would provide data which detailed the change of opinions over a five or six year period.

The community leaders were selected by a committee of four educators engaged in graduate studies at the university. One member of the committee was a principal during the time of the selection, two were about to take up principalships, and one was an ex-chair of the local school board. All four had local knowledge of Gold Cove and were in a position to select appropriate participants.

Response rates. A total of 453 questionnaires were distributed. Of these, 44 were administered to the teachers and administrators in the five schools, 126 to the grade 5 students, 219 to the parents of students in grade 5 and grade 1, and 64 to community leaders.

The overall response rate was 71% (n=323). This was considered acceptable, although there was some variation in response by category. The responses varied from 86% (n=108) for the grade 5 students, 75% (n=165) for the parents, 66% (n=29) for the teachers, and 33% (n=21) for community leaders.

Statistical data analysis. In addition to means and percentage frequency distributions, the data were examined through the use of one-way analyses of variance. A critical value of $p<0.05$ was set to determine statistical significance, and all statistics except p values and percentages were rounded to two decimal places. Where necessary, percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number, and statistical p values were truncated to three decimal places. The statistical tables are only presented where a statistically significant relationship was found to exist.

The Interviews

From the quantitative data, a series of school and community profiles were developed. An analysis of responses to open-ended questions on the survey provided a series of thematic clusters of data. These guided the formation and development of the interview questions. The interviews were conducted during two site visits, one in November 1996 and the second in February 1997. Interviews were held with teachers and the administrative team. From these interviews were developed a series of narrative descriptions of differences between participant expectations for, and the reality of, the new "high-tech" elementary school.

A third site visit is planned for April, 1997. At this time a further series of interviews will be held with parents, students, and community members. A school climate survey will also be administered at that time.

Findings

This paper reports, in a preliminary fashion, some of the findings of Phase 1. These are presented in three sections, followed by a discussion of the relationships between them. The key results of this phase of the research project are:

- school and community profiles for each of the five schools;
- quantitative data related to the perceived climate of the five schools; and
- narrative descriptions of expectations (including fears and perceived challenges) for the amalgamated school.

In the discussion section, two issues are addressed. These are:

- an analysis of the characteristics of the five schools, using frame theory (Bolman & Deal, 1991); and,

- a review of the change process as undertaken, identifying both positive and negative processes and strategies and suggesting those which are worthy of further consideration.

School and Community Profiles

In the mid-1700s, coal was discovered on a small peninsular which juts out into the Atlantic Ocean from Nova Scotia's northern shore. A small British garrison was established to protect the mine, the coal from which was used in an adjacent, and much larger, fortified town. As the various conflicts between the British and the French abated, so mine and garrison were both eventually abandoned, but the coal remained. Some 150 years later, in 1893, several small mines were re-established in the area. Small communities grew around the pit-heads, and in 1901 these amalgamated to form the town of Gold Cove, with a population of 6945 (Colliery Trail, 1997).

Within 40 years, Gold Cove had grown to a population of over 28000 and was being described as the largest town in Canada. There were 12 colliery's in operation, and the harbor was the site of an active commercial fishing fleet. In the 1950s, "Canada's largest town" was also named the swordfish centre of Canada (Colliery Trail, 1997).

The closure of the fishing grounds in the early 1990s has led to a much diminished role for the port. Two processing plants are still in operation, and there is an active lobster fishery, but there are few swordfish and fewer cod. The mines have all closed, and the population has dwindled to under 19000 people (Colliery Trail, 1997). At the height of its prosperity the northeastern section of Gold Cove was served by five elementary schools. Each reflected the smaller community within which it was located.

Town School. This was the largest of the five, and the only one with a gymnasium. Centrally located, its students were drawn from the families of merchants, public servants, officials at the local jail, and others of the middle class. Town School offered special needs education programs which were available to children from all over the area. In the early 1990s, this was the only school to have its own principal.

Calvary School and Creek View School. These were the two schools which served the port area. These schools met the needs of a community with a lower socio-economic status than that served by the Town School. Their catchment areas overlapped, and the schools were divided on religious lines. Calvary served the needs of the Roman Catholic community while Creek View served students from the Presbyterian and Anglican communities. In 1994/1995 there was one principal with responsibility for both these schools.

Lonecave Elementary School and Pithead School. These were the schools which served the area adjacent to the old coal mines. The socio-economic status of these communities was the same as, if not marginally lower than, that of the area around the port. Again the enrollment was divided on religious lines, with Lonecave Elementary School serving the Roman Catholic community while Pithead served those of Protestant denominations. In 1994/1995 these two schools also shared a single principal.

In the 1995/1996 school year, at the time this study commenced, all five schools had been brought under the direction of one principal. The person selected for the position was the one who had had previously been principal of Town School. In addition to his administrative duties, Mr. Gael was also involved in the process of change. Towards the

end of that school year he became more and more involved in the planning of the new school.

Gold Cove Elementary School. The new amalgamated school was opened in September, 1996, with Mr. Gael as principal. The school had an enrollment of 760 students and a staff of 38 teachers. With the exception of Mr. Pict, the vice-principal, all the staff were employed in one of the five schools which had been closed. Unfortunately, the capacity of the new school was exceeded by the enrollment. As a result, the grade primary and grade 1 classes, together with their teachers, remained in Creek View School. The student body at Gold Cove Elementary School was therefore established at 550, with an on-site professional staff of 30 teachers.

Quantitative Data

The questionnaire consisted of 52 items, each of a single statement which respondents were asked to rank on a Likert-type scale. Responses were coded so that 1= strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree. The first 32 items on the instrument distributed to parents, teachers, and community leaders were identical.

Preliminary analyses of the quantitative data from the survey questionnaires involved means and percentage frequency distributions, and one-way analyses of variance. Of the 32 common questions, twelve had an average mean of less than 4.00. One-way ANOVA of these items indicated that only two of these means were statistically significant (see Table 1).

The two items which had an average mean score of less that 4.00 and which exhibited statistically significant variations were items 23 and 32. The statement for item 23 (n=210) was: All students who need special help receive it. The results of the ANOVA

for item 23, classified according to the individual schools and to the adult responses to the survey, are presented in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 1
Range of means for items 1-32.

Item	Average Mean	Range		n	significance
		Lowest	Highest		
1	3.88	3.71	4.00	208	ns
3	3.68	3.44	3.76	209	ns
5	3.89	3.66	4.10	208	ns
6	3.94	3.79	4.06	209	ns
10	3.92	3.74	4.08	204	ns
14	3.13	2.89	3.47	211	ns
15	3.67	3.55	3.69	207	ns
16	3.98	3.67	4.16	209	ns
20	3.98	3.45	4.31	211	ns
23	3.79	3.38	4.08	210	.014
30	3.92	3.71	4.08	208	ns
32	3.92	3.56	4.14	209	.013

Table 2
ANOVA of perceptions that those students who needed special help were receiving it, organized by school

Name of School	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	F Ratio	Probability
Calvary	38	3.89	.95		
Town	36	4.08	.84		
Lonecave	34	3.38	1.10	3.17	.014
Pithead	36	3.94	.95		
Creek View	66	3.68	.83		

Table 3
ANOVA of perceptions that those students who needed special help were receiving it, organized by adult respondents

Type of Respondent	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	F Ratio	Probability
Teachers	29	4.03	.73		
Parents	161	3.79	.93	3.22	.041
Community Leaders	20	3.35	1.18		

The mean response was for Lonecave School was significantly lower than for the other four schools (p= .014). Further analysis indicated that the perception that those students who needed special help were receiving such help was most strongly held by teachers. The mean score of responses made by community leaders was significantly lower (p=.041) than the mean score of responses made by either parents or teachers. There was no significant difference in the mean scores of student responses, organized by school.

The results of the ANOVA for item 32, classified according to the individual schools, are presented in Table 4. Item 32 (n=209) read: The school program prepares students to be successful in junior high school. Again, the mean response was for Lonecave School

was significantly lower than for the other four schools (p= .013). Further analysis revealed no significant difference in the means of either adult or student responses.

Table 4
ANOVA of Perceptions that the school prepared students to be successful in junior high school, organized by school

Name of School	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	F Ratio	Probability
Calvary	36	3.97	.61		
Town	36	4.14	.49		
Lonecave	34	3.56	.93	3.24	.013
Pithead	36	3.97	.77		
Creek View	67	3.94	.67		

The lowest average mean, 3.13, was recorded for item 14: The school provides ample opportunity for the students to be exposed to current technology. The range of means was from 2.89 to 3.47. There was no significant difference between the means for the five schools on this item.

The analyses of variance for responses to the 32 common items on the questionnaire revealed 9 where the difference in the mean scores was statistically significant. In 7 of these cases, the mean scores of responses from Lonecave School were lower than for the other four schools; in two instances the lowest mean score was from Calvary School.

Lonecave School. In addition to the two items previously described, the items on which Lonecave School appeared to fare particularly poorly were generally related to the existence of school-community relations and the provision of extra-curricula activities. On item 2, The school involves parent volunteers in school programs and extra-curricula activities, Lonecave had a mean score of 3.74 (p=.000). There was no significant

difference in the mean scores of adult responses to this item. Among students, Pithead School had a significantly lower mean score of 3.4 (p=.001) than that of the other schools. The results of the ANOVA for item 2, classified according to the student responses to the survey, are presented in Table 5.

Table 5
ANOVA of perceptions that the school involves parent volunteers in school programs and extra-curricula activities, organized by students

Name of School	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	F Ratio	Probability
Calvary	19	4.79	.91		
Town	21	3.95	1.45		
Lonecave	15	4.47	1.19	5.00	.001
Pithead	15	3.40	1.72		
Creek View	38	4.79	.77		

On item 4, There is a regular program for communicating with parents, such as a newsletter, school handbook, conferences, etc., the school had a mean score of 3.51 (p=.003). There was no significant difference between the mean scores of parent, teacher, community leader, or student responses. The results of the ANOVA for item 4, classified according to the individual schools, are presented in Table 6.

Table 6
ANOVA of perceptions that there is a regular program for communicating with parents, organized by school

Name of School	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	F Ratio	Probability
Calvary	38	4.11	.76		
Town	35	4.23	.73		
Lonecave	35	3.51	1.17	4.05	.003
Pithead	36	4.17	.81		
Creek View	67	4.18	.90		

Similarly the school responses showed mean scores lower than for the other schools in respect to item 8, The principal keeps the parents, teachers and students aware of what is happening in the school (p=.037); item 27, Extra-curricula activities are an important part of the school program (p=.012); and item 29, The school makes students feel good about themselves (p=.012).

For both item 8 (p=.002) and item 29 (p=.044), the mean score for community leaders was significantly lower than for either parents or teachers, a situation which did not exist with respect to item 27. There was no significant difference between the mean scores of student responses, organized by school, for any of these three items. The results of the ANOVA for item 8 and item 29, classified according to the individual schools and to the adult responses to the survey, are presented in Tables 7 to 10. The results of the ANOVA for item 27, classified according to the individual schools, are presented in Table 11.

Table 7
ANOVA of perceptions that the principal keeps parents, teachers and students aware of what is happening, organized by school

Name of School	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	F Ratio	Probability
Calvary	37	4.38	.49		
Town	36	4.22	.83		
Lonecave	36	3.86	1.02	2.60	.037
Pithead	36	4.31	.75		
Creek View	66	4.23	.63		

Table 8
ANOVA of perceptions that the principal keeps parents, teachers and students aware of what is happening, organized by adult respondents

Type of Respondent	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	F Ratio	Probability
Teachers	30	4.43	.50		
Parents	162	4.22	.70	6.20	.002
Community Leaders	19	3.68	1.25		

Table 9
ANOVA of perceptions that the school makes students feel good about themselves, organized by school

Name of School	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	F Ratio	Probability
Calvary	37	4.00	.58		
Town	36	4.11	.79		
Lonecave	34	3.80	.85	3.28	.012
Pithead	36	4.36	.49		
Creek View	65	4.06	.63		

Table 10
ANOVA of perceptions that the school makes students feel good about themselves, organized by adult respondents

Type of Respondent	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	F Ratio	Probability
Teachers	29	4.24	.51		
Parents	159	4.07	.68	3.16	.044
Community Leaders	20	3.75	.85		

Table 11
ANOVA of perceptions that extra-curricula activities are an important part of the school program, organized by school

Name of School	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	F Ratio	Probability
Calvary	37	4.02	.73		
Town	36	4.44	.56		
Lonecave	33	3.79	.82	33.29	.012
Pithead	36	4.22	.83		
Creek View	67	4.05	.91		

Calvary School. The school responses showed mean scores lower than for the other schools in respect to two items. These were item 7, School administration are readily available for consultation with staff members, pupils and parents (p=.047), and item 20, our school is clean and well maintained (p=.000). There was no significant difference in the mean scores of adult responses to either of these items. For item 7, student responses indicated a significantly higher mean score of 4.47 (p=.000) at Calvary School than at the other four schools. For item 20, student responses at Pithead School had a mean score of 3.67, which was significantly lower (p=.008) than the mean score of the other four schools. The results of the ANOVA for item 7 and item 20, classified according to the individual schools and to the student responses, are presented in Tables 12 to 15.

Table 12
ANOVA of perceptions that the school administration are readily available for consultation, organized by school

Name of School	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	F Ratio	Probability
Calvary	36	3.86	.80		
Town	36	4.06	.63		
Lonecave	33	3.94	.83	2.45	.047
Pithead	36	4.22	.68		
Creek View	66	4.22	.55		

Table 13
ANOVA of perceptions that the school administration are readily available for consultation, organized by students

Name of School	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	F Ratio	Probability
Calvary	19	4.47	1.31		
Town	21	2.14	1.62		
Lonecave	15	2.33	1.95	7.25	.000
Pithead	15	1.80	1.66		
Creek View	38	2.42	1.80		

Table 14
ANOVA of perceptions that the school is clean and well maintained, organized by school

Name of School	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	F Ratio	Probability
Calvary	38	3.45	1.18		
Town	36	3.81	1.06		
Lonecave	35	4.00	.73	5.94	.000
Pithead	35	4.06	.97		
Creek View	67	4.31	.66		

Table 15
ANOVA of perceptions that the school is clean and well maintained, organized by students

Name of School	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	F Ratio	Probability
Calvary	19	4.79	.92		
Town	21	4.91	.44		
Lonecave	15	5.00	.00	3.60	.008
Pithead	15	3.67	1.95		
Creek View	38	4.58	1.24		

Expectations for the Amalgamated School

In my conversations with teachers, administrators, parents and students throughout the 1995/1996 school year it became evident that they shared similar hopes, and fears, for the new school. These anecdotal comments were supported and more precisely identified through the analysis of the narrative responses to the open-ended questions on the survey. Respondents were asked to identify the three worst and three best issues which they felt either related to their present school or would relate to the new school. There was a remarkable similarity to all the answers, and it was possible to identify three advantages and disadvantages for each context.

The advantages of the old school. It was noted that the old schools were small, friendly, and community oriented institutions. The small class sizes and the existence of a discernible school spirit were noted by many respondents. Teachers were perceived to know all the children in their schools, and to be caring of all of them, not just of the ones in their own class.

One respondent noted that "the interaction between members of the staff and between staff and students is excellent" (#1001), while another commented on the existence of "a sense of intimacy and community; teachers know every child by name" (#2009). The belief that "bigger is not better" (#1007) was reiterated.

The disadvantages of the old school. In contrast, it was also observed that the old schools lacked facilities and resources. For example, in four out of the five schools there was not a gymnasium, requiring students to be bussed to nearby community halls for physical education, and concern was expressed on this issue. The buildings were all described as old, run-down, and in need of major repair. It was accepted that a new school would provide a cleaner environment, and would hopefully also provide access to technological resources such as computers.

The advantages of the new school. The existence of a designated computer lab at the new school, together with the promised focus on technology-enriched learning, was considered to be an attractive feature of the new school. One respondent welcomed the "increase in the number of computers for each classroom, allowing teachers and students to keep up with progress" (#3003). This issue of improved access to computers resonated through the responses.

The large gymnasium was also welcomed, as was the general sense that Gold Cove Elementary School would be a better facility with improved resources and maintenance. There were many references to the loss of time in bussing children from the school to a community hall or other location, and a sizable number of respondents commented on the availability of more comprehensive recreational and physical education equipment. A

number of comments were made with respect to the age of the old schools, to their locations, and to the difficulties of general upkeep. As one interviewee observed:

> My school was a concrete block in the middle of a car park, with nowhere to play and bars on the windows. Inside it was a wonderful place to work, with friendly people, and we all knew all the kids, but from the outside, it looked terrible, a real eyesore. It needed pulling down.

The disadvantages of the new school. At the same time, there was some fear and trepidation. The large size of the school caused anxiety among teachers, parents, and students. One fear was that "there will be such a mass of students that one won't know the other" (#2005). There was a fear that the larger class sizes would reduce the ability of the teachers to care for individual students, and that some would get "lost in the system." One respondent believed that there would be "too many children and not enough teachers for them to get the attention that they need" (#2004), an opinion repeated by many others.

Over the beginning term of the new school, comments by teachers constantly referred to what they described as a "large school syndrome". Symptoms were described as including the perceived high noise levels found within the school, being tired all the time and totally exhausted at the end of the day, and the general sense of disconnection from the staff and student body. Further investigation of this concept will occur as part of phase II of the study.

There was also concern that there would not be enough monitors to ensure student safety. One particular fear was that there would be violence based on groups of schools from the old schools "ganging up" on those from a different school. Another was that problems would arise from "having all the bad children in one school along with people

pushing dope and the bullies" (#2023). The same respondent expressed the "hope [that] there is going to be a fence around this [new] school, to keep the perverts out".

Discussion

In this section, two issues are addressed. First, I identify the characteristics of the five schools, and discuss these using a frame theory approach (Bolman & Deal, 1991). Second, I discuss the applicability of the conceptual model to the change process described in the study.

Characteristics of the Five Schools

The data provide a 'snap-shot' of the five schools which were closed as part of the amalgamation. Further, the data indicate those issues which respondents identified as being important to the success of the new school.

The old schools were negatively characterized as being aged, run-down, and lacking in both facilities and resources. There were great expectations that these issues would be redressed in the new school. Conversely, the five schools were also praised as being small, friendly, and community oriented. There was fear that these positive characteristics would be lost in the new school. In phase II of the study, I shall address the issue of how these expectations differed from the experience of the new school.

The analyses of the quantitative data identified 12 items where the average mean response for all schools was less than 4.00 (agree). These 12 items can be viewed as a cluster of negative characteristics common to all five schools. Following Bolman and Deal (1991), this composite of the five schools was analyzed using four lenses, or frames.

Structural frame. The general lack of facilities and resources were often commented upon in the narrative responses. The schools were not viewed as being clean or well-

maintained, nor were they viewed as providing an opportunity for the students to be exposed to current technology. The inclusion of a gymnasium and a computer laboratory, as well as the installation of a limited number of computers in each classroom, were especially welcomed.

The construction of Gold Cove Elementary School was anticipated to overcome those problems experienced in the five schools. Indeed to some respondents, especially parents, the new school was a panacea which would address all of their concerns with the education system, broadly defined. To other respondents, especially teachers, such a reliance on the efficacy of a new building to address multifaceted concerns was both unrealistic and dangerous, in that the school was unlikely to be able to meet all expectations. There was a concern that, once the 'glow' of the new building had worn off, a subsequent disillusionment might develop among the parents and community leaders. This, in turn, may then have a negative impact on the long term viability and success of the school. These concerns will be addressed throughout the research project. Attempts will be made to 'track' the development of, and changes in, stakeholder perceptions of the efficacy of the school generally, and of the new technology focus specifically, over the next few years.

Human frame. According to the narrative responses, the five schools were viewed as being small, friendly, and staffed by caring teachers. An examination of the responses to particular questions did not support this general perception. It was noted for all schools that efforts to develop the children in a holistic sense, inclusive of physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, and social development, were less that acceptable. Similarly, respondents did not agree that high expectations for student and staff performance existed

in the schools, nor that the school programs adequately prepared students for success when they moved on to junior high school.

The issue of meeting the individual needs of special needs children was especially problematic. With the exception of Town School, which did have a designated program of special needs education, respondents indicated that students who needed special help often did not receive such assistance. Further, respondents from all schools indicated that they did not agree that instruction was planned and adjusted to account for individual difference. These are issues which require further investigation; such investigation shall take place during Phases II and III of the study.

Symbolic frame. The symbolic aspects of a school include the rituals, ceremonies, and other cultural aspects of life in the building. These aspects of the five schools were not explored in detail during this study. There is an intent to document the development of new rituals and ceremonies in the amalgamated school, and to determine which of these were imported from the old schools.

Symbolic aspects of life in a school are guided by the vision, mission, and policy statements of the school. These documents reflect the core belief systems which underlie the culture, or patterns of behavior (Benedict, 1959/1934), considered appropriate to the school. Respondents indicated that such guidance was lacking in the five schools. There was no agreement that the various principals had a vision for their school, nor that the mission or goals statement of the school met the expectations of respondents. Further, there was no agreement that staff members were involved in the development of school objectives and policy.

Political frame. Finally, there were discrepancies between the narrative and quantitative data with respect to the community orientation of the school. There were indications that gaps had developed between the five schools and the communities they served. It was indicated that the schools had failed to utilize community resources to supplement and support their programs. Also, there was no agreement with the statement that parents were encouraged to make informal visits to the school. Subsequent phases of the study will explore this issue and determine the methods implemented by Gold Cove Elementary School in its efforts to establish positive school-community relationships.

Applicability of the Conceptual Model

The model described in Figure 1 was found to have utility for this study. The factors clustered as belonging to the local and external communities were identified, and the further exploration of the characteristics of change is planned for phase II of this study (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991; House, 1981). Together these constituted the change, or stimulus, which occurred. This stimulus was defined as the closing of the five schools and the establishment of the amalgamated school.

The impact of the stimulus on the organism, that is on Gold Cove Elementary School, was explored using the frame theory approach developed by Bolman and Deal (1991). Frame theory was found to facilitate this exploration. Further refining of the conceptual model will continue throughout the period of the study.

Conclusion

In this paper I have presented the overall results of Phase 1 of this research study. These were presented in three sections. First, school and community profiles for each of the five schools were described. Second, quantitative data related to the perceived

climate of the five schools were presented and the analyses of those data were discussed. Third, narrative descriptions of expectations, including fears and perceived challenges for the amalgamated school, were provided and discussed.

The five schools were identified as small, older buildings which served specific ethnocultural, socio-economic, and religious communities within the town. With the closure of these schools, all students and many of the staff were relocated to the new Gold Cove Elementary School, a facility which was designed to provide a "high-tech" environment for the children. In this paper I described the context within which the study is located and reported the base line data collected prior to the closing of the original five schools.

After setting the context, I then reported on each of what appear to be, in a preliminary sense, the key findings. These were explored within a conceptual model which links frame theory (Bolman & Deal, 1991) with a systems model adapted from Luthans (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 1996), influenced by House's (1981) characteristics of change and by Fullan and Stiegelbauer's (1991) notion of interactive factors affecting the implementation of change. The focus of the discussion was on the implications of these findings to the change process, specifically with respect to the establishment of the amalgamated school in Gold Cove, and to the further development of the next phase of the study.

The five old schools were negatively characterized as being aged, run-down, and lacking in both facilities and resources. Respondents expressed substantial expectations that these issues would be corrected at Gold Cove Elementary School. At the same time,

respondents indicated that they wished to preserve the ambiance of the five schools as being small, friendly, and community oriented.

Twelve items with a mean score of less than 4.00 were identified. These were viewed as a cluster of negative characteristics common to all five schools and were analyzed through an application of frame theory (Bolman & Deal, 1991). The data indicated that concerns exist with respect to the widespread belief that the new school was a panacea which would resolve many issues within the education system, broadly defined. It was noted that such a reliance on the efficacy of a new building to address multifaceted concerns was both unrealistic and dangerous.

An examination of the responses identified several areas of concern with respect to the holistic development of children. There were also expectations that issues related to expectations for student and staff performance, the preparation of students for success at the junior high school level, and the meeting of the individual needs of special needs children, would be addressed in the new school. Concerns that instruction should be planned and adjusted to account for individual difference were also raised.

Respondents also ventured the opinion that teachers should be more involved in the development of the policies and procedures of the school. Further, it was suggested that efforts be made to better include the resources of the community into the school program, and to encourage a closer relationship between the parents and the school.

These preliminary findings have gone some way to identify the sheer number and scope of issues related to the change process generally, and specifically to that process as it affects schools in Gold Cove. All of the issues raised require further investigation, and this will take place during Phases II and III of the study.

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